

Chapter 2: Background

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Background

Chapter 2

Background

This Chapter provides background information and data as context and a framework for the Comprehensive Plan.

Location, Regional Setting, Government

Charles County is located in Southern Maryland, with the northern county line being approximately 18 miles south of Washington, D.C. (see Figure 2-1). The County comprises approximately 460 square miles of land area and is bordered by Prince George's County to the north; the Potomac River to the west and south; with the Wicomico River, St. Mary's County, and a short segment of the Patuxent River to the east. Charles County contains three incorporated towns; La Plata, which is the County seat, Indian Head, and Port Tobacco.

History

Chartered in 1658, Charles County's heritage spans four centuries and encompasses a rich mixture of cultures and traditions. From the region's first Native American inhabitants at least 12,000 years ago, to the establishment of the Naval Proving Ground at Indian Head in the late 19th century, the County's history reflects the diversity and continuity of life in southern Maryland. The County boasts numerous archeological sites and historic resources listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties. Several historic properties are open to the public including Thomas Stone National Historic Site, Maxwell Hall, Mt. Aventine, the Dr. Samuel Mudd House and the Port Tobacco Historic District. Some of the County's most important heritage resources are located along key scenic corridors such as the Booth's Escape Scenic Byway and Civil War Trail, the Religious Freedom National Scenic Byway and the Star Spangled Banner National Historic Trail and Scenic Byway.

Each of the towns and villages in the County has its own special history. The maritime village of Benedict, founded in 1683, is the site of the British landing during the War of 1812. Indian Head was founded in 1890 when the U.S. Navy established a proving ground on Cornwallis Neck. Waldorf, now the County's largest community with a population close to 68,000 (Census Designated Place 2010), was first established in 1872 as a stop along the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad line. It began to transform from a local village into a regional service center and tourist destination with the construction of Crain Highway (later US 301) in the 1920s and 1930s. A Potomac River Bridge, now the Gov. Harry W. Nice Memorial Bridge, was completed in 1940 opening the area to north-south traffic on U.S. 301 and helping transform the County.

Modern residential development on a large scale came to Charles County in 1970 with the beginning of construction of the St. Charles planned community. Still under development, it has a future potential build-out of close to 25,000 homes.

Charles County's close proximity to the Washington-Baltimore area, its open spaces, rural areas, waterfront, and villages continues to attract residents to the County.

Population, Housing, and Employment

Historic Trends

As of 2010 Charles County's population was 146,551. In 2016 it is 155,000. Waldorf, including the large planned community of St. Charles, is the County's major population center.

Between 2000 and 2010 Charles County's population increased by 22 percent (Table 2-1). This made Charles County the fastest growing county in the State in terms of percent change (similar to St. Mary's County). The County's average annual rate of growth was 1.97 percent, higher than its 1.8 percent rate between 1990 and 2000. In 2016 the ten year average rate of growth was 1.4 percent. At-place employment (jobs located in Charles County) increased by approximately 12,800 or 26 percent over the last decade.

Table 2-1 Socioeconomic Trends 1990 to 2010

	2010	2000	1990	Change 2000 to 2010	
				Number	Percent
Population	146,551	120,546	101,154	26,005	22%
Households	51,214	41,668	32,950	9,546	23%
Housing Units	54,963	43,903	34,487	11,060	25%
At-Place Employment ⁽¹⁾	62,199	49,370	38,209	12,829	26%

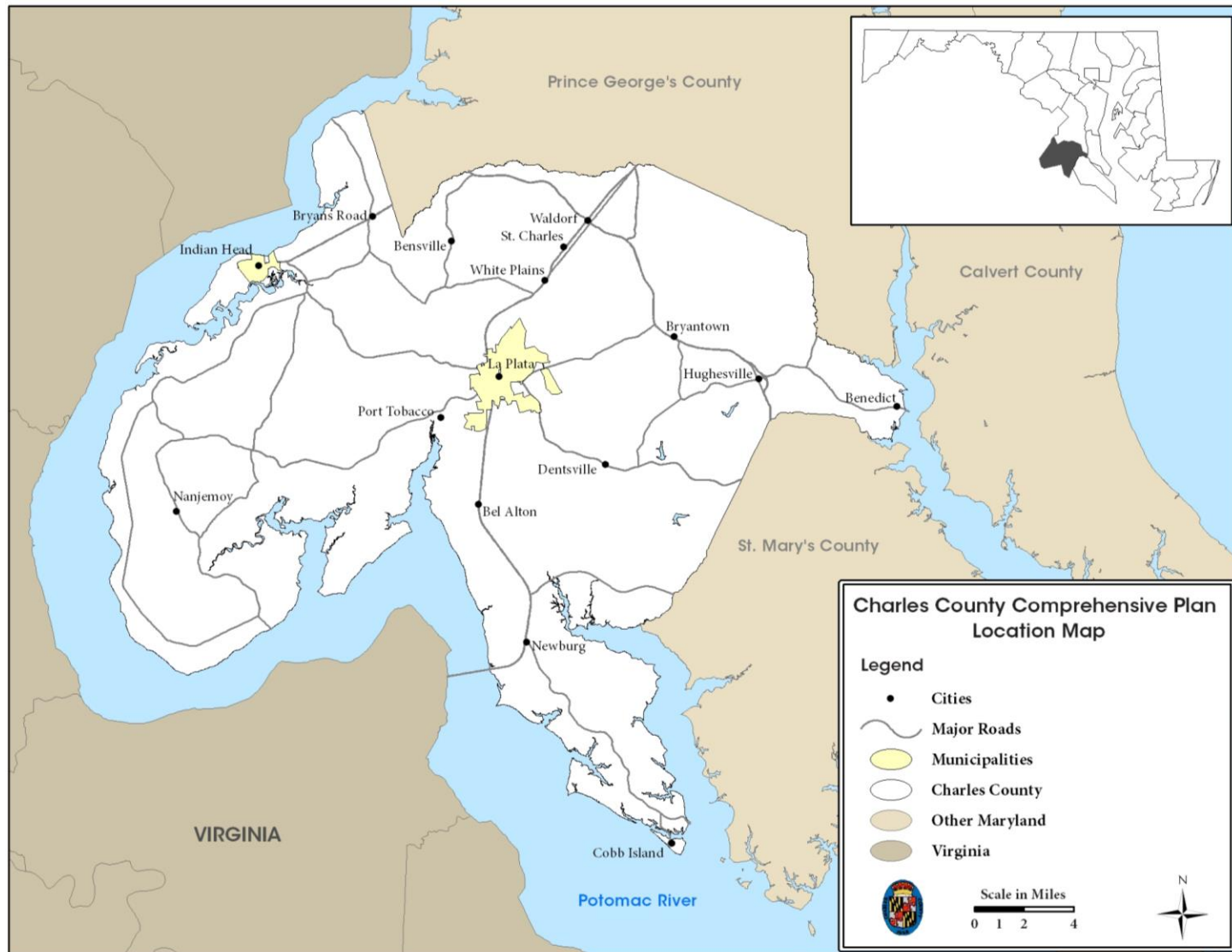
Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, MDP, WASHCOG Round 8.0 Cooperative Forecasts

(1) At-place employment means jobs located in Charles County.

Projections

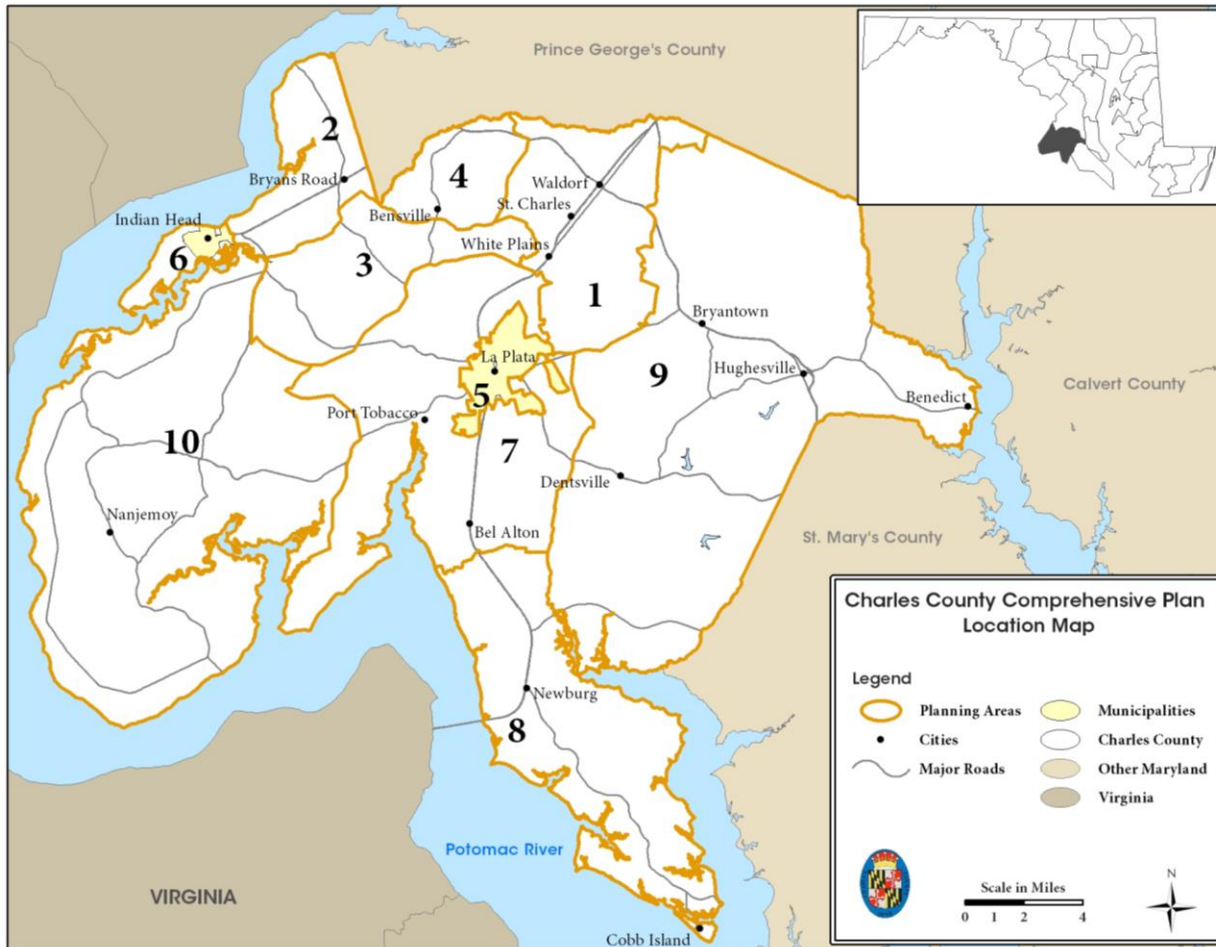
Due to the significant changes made by this plan, including downzoning measures to protect the County's natural resources, and increasing the size of Priority Preservation Areas (PPAs), it is anticipated that the growth rate will be slowed and closer to a 1% or less rate of growth in the near future. The rate of growth impacts from these major land use changes should be monitored over the life of this plan to better understand the success of changes as a growth management strategy for Charles County. As of 2016, the changes are still too new to fully measure the effect of growth. A 1% growth rate would yield approximately 37,000 new residents for Charles County during the projected life of this plan to the year 2040.

Figure 2-1 Charles County Location Map



Note: La Plata and Indian Head are incorporated municipalities with zoning authority. Port Tobacco is an incorporated municipality but does not exercise zoning authority.

Figure 2-2 Comprehensive Plan Planning Areas



Between 2001 and 2010 Charles County averaged approximately 1,015 new residential building permits per year¹. The projected number of units is higher than this, but is not inconsistent with the County's more rapid periods of growth since the 1990s. The last ten years from 2006 to 2016 was closer to 850 units per year. Changes made to this plan to control growth may result in less housing units being built per year, but the attraction of new housing for Charles County will remain in place.

¹ 2010 Annual Report of the Charles County Planning Commission; Charles County 2006 Comprehensive Plan.

These projections serve as the basis for subsequent elements of the Plan and are based on the following assumptions:

- The Washington region is projected to continue to grow in jobs and population (1.35 million net new jobs and 758,000 households between 2010 and 2040)². Charles County is expected to capture around four percent of this regional household growth.
- Housing costs will remain somewhat lower in Charles County than in other counties in the region.
- Growth control mechanisms, especially zoning, water and sewer policies, and adequate public facility regulations, will continue to result in 70 to 75 percent of new growth occurring in the Development District and the towns.
- Planned communities, especially St. Charles, will absorb significant amounts of growth.
- “Pipeline” development will absorb much of the projected growth. Pipeline development refers to subdivisions with at least preliminary plan approval, other approved development projects (e.g., St. Charles, Heritage Green), and other envisioned developments (e.g., the Waldorf Urban Redevelopment Corridor area, Waldorf Station). As of 2011, Charles County had approximately 24,200 housing units in the pipeline³. However, due to Subdivision Code changes made in 2013, which limit times that projects can maintain approvals to 12 years, along with changes to the Development District in this plan, it is anticipated that this pipeline of projects will be reduced in the future in order to better control sprawl.
- Jobs in Charles County will increase but a high proportion of the work force will continue to commute out of the County.

Land Use / Land Cover

As of 2009, approximately 25 percent or 73,400 acres of the County’s land area was developed, an increase of approximately 26,500 acres, or 57 percent, since 1997. There was a comparable decline of resource lands during this period which now comprise approximately 221,000 acres or 75 percent of the County, down from 84 percent in 1997 (see Table 2-3 and Figure 2-3).

Table 2-3 shows a reduction in resource land and an increase in developed land between 1997 and 2009. However, it should be noted that a significant change in calculation methodology occurred for MDP’s 2007 dataset, based on more detailed satellite imagery. The 2007 dataset includes a new “rural residential” category that counts low density rural development as development whereas in 2002 and 1997 much of this land was included with agricultural or forest land. Thus the 1997 and 2002 data likely understated the amount of development lands and overstated the amount of resource lands. As a result the actual changes between 1997 and 2009 may not be as large as implied by the numbers alone.

² Charles County Land Use Market Supply and Demand Analysis, July 2011.

³ Data developed for Charles County Comprehensive Plan Regional Visioning Work Sessions, May 2011.

Table 2-2 Land Cover 1997 to 2009

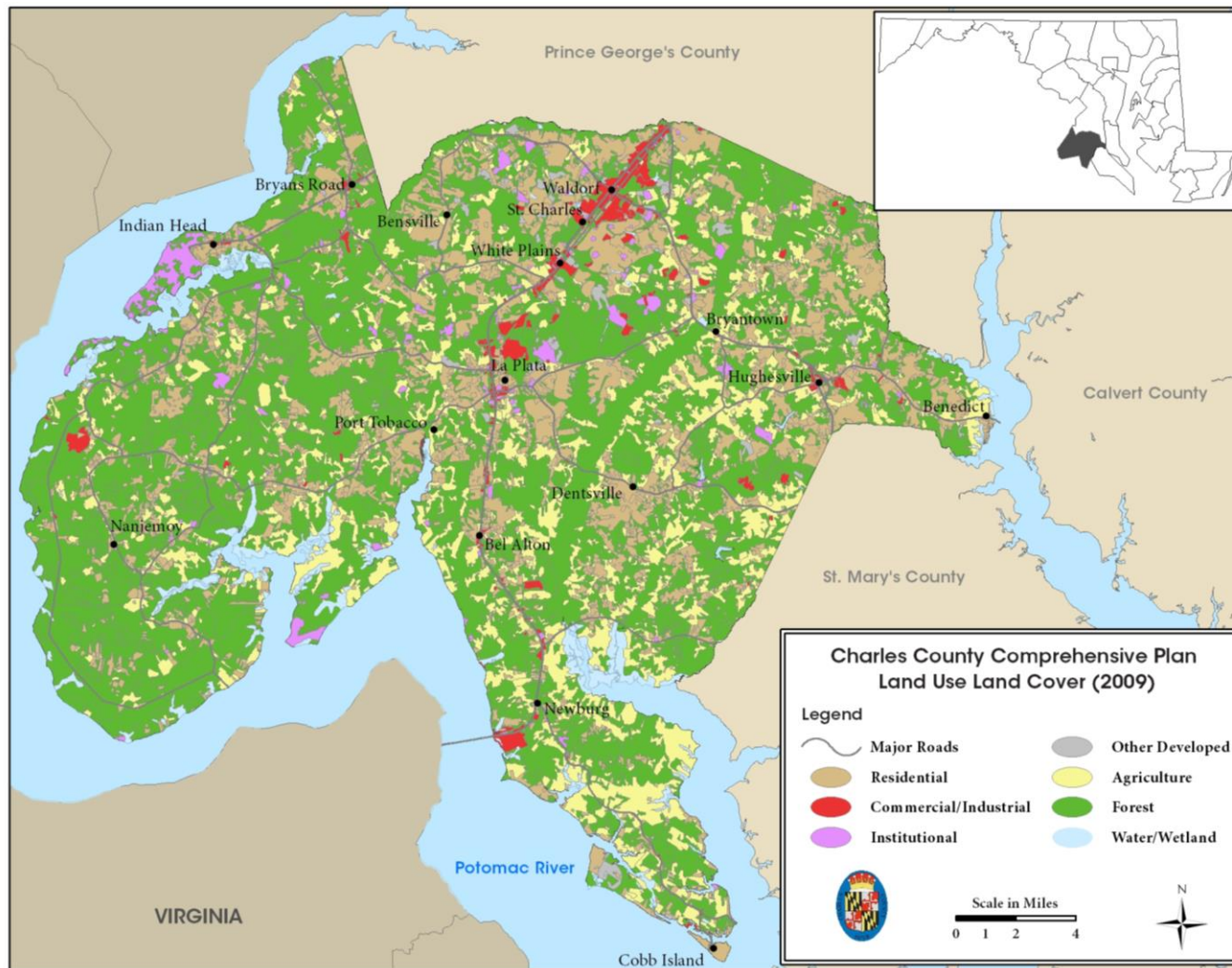
	1997		2002		2009		Change 1997-2009	
	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%
Residential								
Low Density	29,403	10	33,156	11	52,055	18	22,652	77
Medium & High Density	7,877	3	6,933	2	10,273	3	2,396	30
Commercial & Industrial	4,681	2	4,616	2	4,156	1	(525)	(11)
Institutional & Open	4,917	2	3,695	1	6,935	2	2,018	41
Other Developed Land			2,258	1				
<i>Total Developed Land</i>	<i>46,878</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>50,658</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>73,419</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>26,541</i>	<i>57</i>
Agriculture	61,097	21	57,514	20	46,784	16	(14,313)	(23)
Forest	177,855	60	178,472	61	164,610	56	(13,245)	(7)
Extractive & Barren	1,935	1	860	0.3	2,783	1	848	44
Wetland	6,755	2	6,900	2	6,770	2	15	0.2
<i>Total Resource Lands</i>	<i>247,642</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>243,746</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>220,947</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>(26,695)</i>	<i>(11)</i>
Total Land in County	294,520	100	294,404	100	294,366	100		

Notes:

1. Numbers in parenthesis indicate negative change or percent in land use/cover.
2. The Maryland Department of Planning has changed its methodology in estimating acreage inventories in the three reporting periods resulting in slight variations in total county land area acreage.
3. Percents may not equal totals due to rounding.

Sources: Maryland's Changing Land: Past Present and Future, Maryland Department of Planning, 2001; Maryland Department of Planning, 2002 and 2007 Land Use/Land Cover dataset; with 2011 updates for the Charles County Comprehensive Plan based on 2009 aerial

Figure 2-3 Land Use / Land Cover



Source: Maryland Department of Planning, 2007 Land Use/Land Cover dataset with 2011 updates for the Charles County Comprehensive Plan based on 2009 aeriels.